



TURNING ADVERSITY INTO *Opportunity*

By Elishia Ballentine, Editor

Stewardship – it’s a term that Dr. Salem Saloom obviously takes to heart, on several different levels. As a retired physician, he has practiced a form of stewardship among his fellow citizens in south Alabama for several years. In addition to his local healthcare practice, he has worked through “Samaritan’s Purse,” a global medical missions organization, taking his surgical skills around the world. The Saloom family first traveled to Haiti in 2000; then Togo, West Africa in 2004; and finally to Egypt in both 2007 and 2008.

As a landowner, Salem has also practiced stewardship since 1983, when he and his wife, Dianne, purchased their first parcel of land. Both always had a desire to own property, so this quiet place in the country was a dream-come-true for them. The 158-acre tract was located in rural Conecuh County near Evergreen, less than an hour’s drive from their Brewton home. At that time, it not only provided an opportunity to get away from the hassles of city life and the stress associated with a medical practice, but also, more importantly, it was a place to teach their young son, Patrick, the value of caring for the land and appreciating nature.

Even with the Salooms’ busy professional schedule, they managed to make several visits to the farm each month. Much of that time was spent maintaining and improving the mostly untouched property. Almost immediately they began planting loblolly pines, building a pond, and making improvements on the road system. At Saloom Properties, LLC, it’s definitely been a family affair. With their “hands on” approach, Salem and Dianne have done a lot of the work themselves. Patrick, now 24

and a recent graduate from the University of West Florida with a degree in Maritime Studies, has also contributed.

Certified as a TREASURE Forest in 1985, just two years after purchasing the land, their primary objectives are timber and wildlife. The 2007 Southwest Region winner of the Helene Mosley Memorial Award, the Saloom property now consists of over 1,762 acres. With the adjacent 644 acres they lease for hunting, Dr. Saloom manages 2,400 acres total.

One of his major tasks has been the ongoing battle with invasive species. “The main three culprits are kudzu, privet, and the absolute worst . . . cogongrass. Nothing will grow where it exists!” Salem exclaimed.

Noting that August is the best time to spray for both cogongrass and kudzu, and that each invasive species requires a different prescription, he applies his herbicidal sprayings using a 50-gallon tractor-mounted sprayer and a 25-gallon sprayer on a four-wheeler. He stated that they feel very blessed to be able to partake in several cost-share programs for invasive species – such as WHIP & EQIP – and he encourages other landowners to seek out these helpful programs.

Although previously experiencing relative good luck in suppressing the pesky plants using a three-year rotation of herbicidal spraying – keeping them contained to about 50 acres – he noticed a change after Hurricane Ivan. In opening up the under-story in cleanup after the storm, there was more sunlight on the ground, and consequently more cogongrass. For the past three consecutive years, he’s applied Arsenal and glyphosate with good results. Dr. Saloom says that the main lesson about

invasives is that, “Even when you see progress, you can’t stop there. You have to be persistent.”

Over the years, Salem has discovered some very innovative ways to address stream crossings such as using discarded bridge panels from the Bookers Mill Bridge demolition, as well as acquiring steel bailey bridges from the local National Guard armory. Equipped with his own dozer and backhoe, he has constructed fences, roads, turnouts, and water bars, as well as established permanent fire lanes. When it comes to site prepping, Dr. Saloom performs his own prescribed burns, having completed the certified burn manager’s course in 2006. He also became a Master Tree Farmer earlier that same year.

Since retiring, Salem and Dianne have devoted most all of their time to managing their property and their list of accomplishments is almost endless. However, the journey has not been without heartache. As did many other Alabama landowners, the Salooms dealt with the devastating effects of Hurricane Ivan.

Practicing what he preaches . . . “You’ve got to be positive and proactive, and just move on,” the day after Ivan hit, he got a commitment from a logger. They spent the next five months in logging operations: clearcutting, thinning, and taking down leaning trees. Then, after several months of clean-up, Dr. Saloom started replanting trees. With his growing interest in longleaf pines and the property being a natural longleaf site, he saw the storm damage as an opportunity for reforestation in longleaf.

“In the aftermath of Ivan, there were places where I couldn’t even walk it was so badly damaged,” Salem said. “You think to yourself, this will never be as nice as it was. But, you have to move away from those thoughts. It became my motivation to make it better than it had ever been. The hurricane just gave me another opportunity to do that.”

Today the Conecuh County property contains over 440 acres of longleaf, with more plantings scheduled in the future. There are also 250 acres of hardwoods, and most of the remaining property is planted in different-aged stands of loblolly pines. In January of 2007, they planted 49 live oak seedlings that line the main drive.

Dr. Saloom, an avid turkey hunter, used some of the areas damaged by the storm to help with his wildlife management practices. Prior to Ivan, the property had about 1 to 2% open land. Salem’s goal was to increase this to about 5% for turkey and quail. He says the hurricane devastation gave him the opportunity to create much larger food plots and wildlife openings. Today, there are over 46 acres of permanent food plots.



Photo by Kelvin Daniels

Also for the wildlife, he planted several fruit-bearing trees such as shumard and sawtooth oaks, gobbler oaks, chestnut, crabapples, persimmon, Asian pears, and 575 Chickasaw plum trees.

The Salooms found yet another way to make the best of a bad situation . . . the damage to trees was not limited to the Conecuh property. Following the wrath of Ivan, there were nine large longleaf pines down in the yard at their home in Brewton, with three of them actually falling on the house! Contracting a portable sawmill, they cut 6,800 board feet of lumber from these. Additionally, after harvesting 60 logs from a downed cedar tree from the farm, they had it milled into 2,800 board feet, dry kilned, planed, and tongue & grooved. All of this wood was used to add an additional room on the cabin at the farm. This cabin is not only a get-away for their immediate family, but it is also enjoyed when friends and extended family visit the farm for recreation and hunting as well.

There have been other major setbacks as well. Because of the drought in 2006, followed by the even more severe drought in

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Standing in a patch of cogongrass, one of Salem’s major tasks has been the ongoing battle with invasive species.

2007, they lost 90,000 longleaf pines. However, once again, Salem has persevered. In December of last year, they completed several months of “supplemental” planting of 90,000 containerized longleaf seedlings. Although there has traditionally not been much problem with Southern Pine Beetle on the property, they are currently experiencing Ips beetle infestations . . . another gift from the drought that keeps on giving. And now, another result of the stress caused by the drought has surfaced . . . this year, several oaks are dying from a fungus. They’ve had to cut several of them, but they’re utilizing this wood as an “opportunity,” once again, this summer building a hay barn, stables, and fencing 2,500 feet of pasture for Dianne’s two horses.

The Salooms have utilized their TREASURE Forest to help educate other landowners and students about good stewardship, which includes hosting the forestry tour for the National Tree Farmers Convention in October of 2006, and the Conecuh County field trip for the “Forest in the Classroom/Classroom in the Forest” program for the last couple years. This past spring, approximately 100 fifth grade students from Sparta Academy, Marshall, and Repton schools attended.

As this story was being written, the Salooms were busy in preparation of another upcoming event. On October 1, they will



Diane and Salem Saloom welcome students to their property for the Classroom in the Forest program in April of 2008.
Courtesy of the Evergreen Courier

host Alabama’s 2008 Regional Forestry Field Day tour for the Southwest Region.

Even with all the challenges and setbacks over the last few years, Salem reiterated that his family has certainly been blessed to be able to do all that they do. If ever anyone has turned adversity into opportunity, it would be the Salooms . . . true practitioners of stewardship. 🌲

In spite of devastating losses from Hurricane Ivan (background) and two consecutive years of drought (inset left), the Saloom family have persevered, replanting as necessary. Dr. Saloom inspects young longleaf with Victor Howell, Alabama Forestry Commission Conecuh County Manager (inset right).

